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ABSTRACT

This paper speaks to the question of just what people in a human communication studies department do. The paper traces the study of communication historically, beginning with classical times in Greece and "impersonal communication," when the first formal education in communication was not theoretical, but applied. The paper points out that although some attention was given to arrangement, the emphasis was on logic, proof, and plausibility. Rhetoric which convinced and which got results was "good rhetoric." It also notes that rhetoric was tied to public oratory and was used in the formal schooling of Roman boys. The paper also states that during the medieval period, when the first universities were formed, rhetoric was one-third of the "trivium," an undergraduate education of grammar, rhetoric, and logic. According to the paper, that began to change in 1947 with the arrival at the University of Denver of Elwood Murray, a scholar who believed that it would be worthwhile to study and teach "interpersonal communication." The paper then considers the contributions of some scholars who came after Murray, such as Evelyn Sieburg and Gregory Bateson, and discusses one interpersonal variable, "confirmation." It concludes that some ways of relating are more satisfying than others: they are humanizing; they are individuating; and they are confirming. Making sense and making contact are not mutually exclusive. (NKA)

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Making Contact or Making Sense: Functional and Dysfunctional Ways of Relating.

by Alton Barbour

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MAKING CONTACT OR MAKING SENSE:
FUNCTIONAL AND DYSFUNCTIONAL WAYS OF RELATING

Alton Barbour

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE LECTURE 1999-2000 SERIES

I THINK I AM HERE TO SPEAK TO THE QUESTION OF, "WHAT THE HELL IS IT YOU PEOPLE DO OVER THERE?"

IN ANSWERING THE QUESTION, I WILL GIVE A BRIEF HISTORY WHICH WILL PROVIDE SOME CONTEXT FOR SOME OF WHAT A FEW OF US IN THE HUMAN COMMUNICATION STUDIES DEPARTMENT HAVE DONE IN THE PAST THREE DECADES AND WHAT WE CONTINUE TO DO NOW, AND SOME OF WHAT MY ROLE HAS BEEN IN IT. THIS IS THE "MAKING SENSE" PART OF THE TITLE.

FOR MOST OF THE FORMAL HISTORY OF THE STUDY OF COMMUNICATION, WHICH GOES BACK TO CLASSICAL TIMES, WE IN COMMUNICATION HAVE STUDIED WHAT ONE MIGHT CALL IMPERSONAL COMMUNICATION.

THE STORY BEGINS IN THE CITY OF SYRACUSE OF THE ISLAND OF SICILY ON THE EASTERN SHORE NEAREST TO GREECE IN THE MID-400S B.C. AT THAT TIME THERE WERE CITIZEN SOLDIERS WHO WERE CALLED INTO MILITARY SERVICE, AND WHEN THE CRISIS WAS PAST, RETURNED TO THEIR HOMES AND THEIR TRADES. THIS WAS LONG AFTER THE GREEKS BECAME LITERATE. SO WHAT HAPPENED WAS WRITTEN DOWN, AND WE EVEN KNOW THE NAMES OF THOSE INVOLVED.

TWO MEN, CORAX AND TISIAS, WHO HAD BEEN AWAY TO WAR, RETURNED FROM FIGHTING TO FIND A UNIQUE SITUATION. WHILE THEY WERE AWAY, THEIR HOMES AND LANDS HAD BEEN CONFISCATED, AND THEY WERE REQUIRED TO GO TO A COURT OF LAW AND ARGUE FOR RESTORATION OF THEIR PROPERTY.

THIS WAS A WONDERFUL TIME ON EARTH WHEN THERE WERE NO LAWYERS. LAWYERS DID NOT APPEAR ON THE SCENE UNTIL THE LATE ROMAN PERIOD, DURING THE TIME OF EASTERN ROMAN EMPEROR JUSTINIAN THE MID-500S A.D. THE WRITTEN RECORDS AND CODES MAKE IT CLEAR THAT IN MESOPOTAMIA AND EGYPT AND GREECE, THERE WAS NO SUCH THING AS A LAWYER. THERE WERE COURTS AND THERE WERE JUDGES AND THERE WERE EVEN JURIES, BUT THERE WERE NO LAWYERS.

YOU MAY REMEMBER FROM THE BIBLICAL STORY OF SOLOMON AND THE TWO WOMEN WHO BOTH CLAIMED TO BE THE MOTHER OF THE SAME CHILD, THAT THEY HAD TO GO TO COURT AND ARGUE THEIR OWN CASES.

THIS WAS TRUE WITH CORAX AND TISIAS. THEY HAD TO PLEAD THEIR OWN CASES, AND THEY DID SO AND WON THEM. BEING SUCCESSFUL, THEY DECIDED THAT THEY COULD TEACH OTHERS TO DO THE SAME. THEIRS WAS THE FIRST SCHOOL OF RHETORIC. CORAX AND TISIAS WERE TEACHING SPEECH-MAKING AND ARGUMENT AIMED AT GETTING RESULTS.

THE WAY THE STORY GOES IS THAT CORAX BROUGHT THE SCHOOL TO THE MAINLAND OF GREECE IN *CIRCA* 427 B.C. MUCH LIKE THE UNIVERSITY OF PHOENIX.

ONE POINT TO BE MADE HERE IS THAT THE FIRST FORMAL EDUCATION IN COMMUNICATION WAS NOT THEORETICAL, BUT WAS SUPPOSED TO BE APPLIED. AND IT HAS BEEN THAT WAY EVER SINCE. THERE HAS ALWAYS BEEN AN APPLIED ASPECT TO THE STUDY OF COMMUNICATION. MOREOVER, WE DON'T BELIEVE THERE IS ANYTHING WRONG WITH THAT.

ANOTHER POINT IS THAT THOUGH THERE WAS SOME ATTENTION GIVEN TO ARRANGEMENT OR *DISPOSITIO*, THE EMPHASIS WAS ON LOGIC, PROOF AND PLAUSIBILITY. RHETORIC WHICH CONVINCED AND WHICH GOT RESULTS WAS GOOD RHETORIC. THE EMPHASIS WAS ON MAKING SENSE IN COURT.

STILL ANOTHER POINT IS THAT RHETORIC WAS TIED TO ORATORY. THIS WAS ALL ABOUT THE MAKING OF SPEECHES IN FRONT OF AUDIENCES. IT WAS FORMAL SPEECH, PUBLIC SPEECH, PLATFORM PUBLIC ADDRESS. AND AS THEY SAY IN THE MAFIA, IT MAY HAVE BEEN ABOUT BUSINESS, BUT IT WASN'T "PERSONAL."

THAT APPROACH TO RHETORIC AND ORATORY WAS CONTINUED IN THE FORMAL SCHOOLING OF ROMAN BOYS. (GIRLS WERE NOT EDUCATED.) THEN DURING THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD, WHEN THE FIRST UNIVERSITIES WERE FORMED, RHETORIC WAS ONE THIRD OF THE *TRIVIUM*, AN UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION OF GRAMMAR, RHETORIC AND LOGIC.

RHETORIC WAS NOT ONLY THE CONTENT OF A MEDIEVAL EDUCATION; IT WAS ALSO CENTRAL TO THE PROCESS. THIS WAS PRE-PRINTING PRESS. BOOKS WERE BEING COPIED IN MONASTARIES, BUT THEY WERE STILL SO RARE THAT IF A STUDENT WANTED TO READ, HE ACTUALLY HAD TO RENT A BOOK. THE WAY THAT THE LEARNING WAS CONDUCTED WAS THROUGH *DISPUTATIO* OR ARGUMENT. A PROPOSITION WAS STATED, AND STUDENTS AND TEACHERS WOULD THEN ARGUE IT FOR DAYS, HOPEFULLY ARRIVING EVENTUALLY AT SOME APPROXIMATION OF TRUTH. YOU MAY THINK THAT THIS IS A QUAINT IDEA, THAT TRUTH COULD BE ARRIVED AT THROUGH ARGUMENT, BUT ISN'T THAT WHAT IS SUPPOSED TO HAPPEN IN COURT? THIS WAY OF TEACHING IS NOT MUCH DIFFERENT FROM THE SOCRATIC DIALECTIC THAT YOU READ IN PLATO'S <u>DIALOGUES</u>. SOCRATES TRIED TO EDUCATE HIS STUDENTS BY ARGUING WITH THEM.

WHEREAS IN THOSE DAYS, PEOPLE COULD ARGUE ANY PHILOSOPHICAL QUESTION, THEY COULDN'T ARGUE THEOLOGICAL ONES, BECAUSE IN THEOLOGY, TRUTH HAD ALREADY BEEN ARRIVED AT AND COULD NOT BE QUESTIONED.

RHETORIC CONCERNED ITSELF WITH WHAT IT MIGHT TAKE TO PERSUADE PEOPLE. SOMETIMES THAT HAD TO DO WITH CHARACTER OR *ETHOS*, SOME TIMES TO DO WITH EMOTIONS OR *PATHOS*, AND SOMETIMES TO DO WITH RATIONALITY, OR *LOGOS*. BUT OVERALL IN ORDER TO BE PERSUASIVE ONE HAD TO MAKE SENSE. STYLE AND ELOQUENCE WERE FROSTING ON THE CAKE.

LATER IN THE BRITISH AND AMERICAN UNIVERSITIES, WHEN RHETORIC WAS STUDIED, THE EMPHASIS WAS STILL ON THE WELL-CONCEIVED AND WELL-DELIVERED MESSAGE. IT WAS AXIOMATIC THAT A WELL-CONCEIVED AND WELL-DELIVERED MESSAGE WAS GOOD COMMUNICATION. NO ONE IMAGINED THAT IT MIGHT BE OTHERWISE. IT WAS ABOUT CONTENT AND PRESENTATION, NOT ABOUT INTERACTION. IT IS WHAT I HAVE BEEN CALLING THE "SHOT PUT" APPROACH TO COMMUNICATION AS COMPARED WITH THE "FRISBEE" APPROACH TO COMMUNICATION.

THAT BEGAN TO CHANGE IN 1947, AND IT CHANGED FIRST HERE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF DENVER. WE ARE NOW AT THE "MAKING CONTACT" PART OF THE PRESENTATION. WHAT HAPPENED WAS THAT WE HAD A PROFESSOR HERE WHO HAD ARRIVED AT THE UNIVERSITY IN 1931. HE WAS TRAINED IN RHETORIC AT IOWA STATE, BUT HE WAS ALSO AN EMPIRICIST. HE WAS A SOCIAL SCIENTIST. HIS NAME WAS ELWOOD MURRAY, AND I BROUGHT A PICTURE OF HIM TO PASS AROUND. ELWOOD HAD BEEN A COLLEGIATE DEBATER IN NEBRASKA. HE WAS THE HIGH SCHOOL DEBATE COACH FOR NATHAN PUSEY, THE PRESIDENT OF HARVARD. AS A DEBATER, HE HAD MUCH APPRECIATION FOR LOGIC, EVIDENCE, AND THE WELL-CONCEIVED AND WELL-DELIVERED MESSAGE.

BUT IT OCCURRED TO HIM THAT WE DON'T SPEND MOST OF OUR LIVES DEBATING OR GIVING SPEECHES. WE SPEND MOST OF OUR LIVES HAVING CONVERSATIONS. WE DON'T SPEND OUR LIVES IN FORMAL COMMUNICATION, BUT INFORMAL COMMUNICATION. WE DON'T SPEND OUR LIVES IN IMPERSONAL COMMUNICATION, BUT IN <u>INTERPERSONAL</u> COMMUNICATION. HE THOUGHT IT WOULD BE WORTH HIS WHILE TO STUDY AND TO TEACH INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION AND HE BEGAN DOING SO AFTER WW II IN 1947. THE FIRST CLASSES IN AMERICA IN INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION WERE OFFERED HERE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF DENVER. IT DIDN'T CATCH ON IMMEDIATELY. THE NEXT PERSON TO OFFER CLASSES IN INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION TWENTY YEARS LATER WAS DEAN BARNLUND AT SAN FRANCISCO STATE UNIVERSITY. THEN THE TIME WAS RIGHT, IN THE 1960S, AND THEN IT DID CATCH ON.

ELWOOD MURRAY WAS AHEAD OF HIS TIME. IF YOU WERE TO LOOK AT THE MOST RECENT PROGRAM OF THE NATIONAL CONVENTION FOR THE NATIONAL COMMUNICATION ASSOCIATION, YOU WOULD SEE THAT VERY LITTLE SPACE IN IT DEVOTED TO FORMAL SPEECH AND VERY MUCH SPACE IS DEVOTED TO INFORMAL, INTERPERSONAL SPEECH.

THEN SOMETHING ELSE HAPPENED IN A DEPARTMENT WHICH WAS RECEPTIVE TO RESEARCH IN INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION. WE HAD A GRADUATE STUDENT NAMED EVELYN SIEBURG, WHO IN 1969 DID THE FIRST INVESTIGATION IN WHAT IS NOW CALLED CONFIRMATION-DISCONFIRMATION. THIS CONCEPT WILL TAKE A LITTLE EXPLAINING.

THE IDEA EXISTED BEFORE EVELYN. ENGLISH PSYCHIATRIST, R D. LAING, COINED THE TERM, SAYING THAT CONFIRMATION WAS TO <u>RECOGNIZE, ACKNOWLEGE AND ENDORSE</u> ANOTHER PERSON. . LAING'S WORK WAS BASED ON THE IDEAS OF MARTIN BUBER CONCERNING I-IT AND I-THOU RELATIONS. OTHERS HAD ALSO ADDRESSED THE WAYS IN WHICH PEOPLE RELATE TO ONE ANOTHER INCLUDING SIGMUND FREUD, HERBERT SPEIGELBURG, AND ABRAHAM MASLOW.

EXAMPLES:

SIGMUND FREUD (NARCISSISTIC, <u>ANACLITIC</u>, MATURE)
MARTIN BUBER (<u>I-IT</u>, I-THOU)
ABRAHAM MASLOW (<u>D-LOVE</u>, B-LOVE)
HERBERT SPEIGELBERG (<u>FUNCTIONAL</u>, ONTIC)

BUT THE MOST MEANINGFUL INSIGHTS CAME FROM GREGORY BATESON, AN ENGLISH ANTHROPOLOGIST LIVING IN THE UNITED STATES. BATESON TOOK HIS INITIAL CUES FROM BERTRAND RUSSELL WHO SAID IN 1915 THAT WE NEEDED TO SEPARATE STATEMENTS ABOUT OBJECTS FROM STATEMENTS ABOUT RELATIONS. ONE DIDN'T MAKE SENSE WHEN APPLIED TO THE OTHER.

BASED ON HIS WORK IN A VETERANS HOSPITAL IN PALO ALTO, BATESON ELABORATED ON THE IDEA. HE POINTED OUT THAT EVERY HUMAN UTTERANCE HAD BOTH AN OBJECT LEVEL AND A RELATIONAL LEVEL. WHEN WE SPEAK TO SOMEONE ELSE, WE ARE MAKING TWO STATEMENTS AT THE SAME TIME. WE ARE SPEAKING ABOUT WHATEVER THE TOPIC IS (THE OBJECT LEVEL), BUT ON A META-LEVEL, WE ARE ALSO TELLING THE OTHER PERSON AT THE SAME TIME SOMETHING ABOUT THE NATURE OF THE RELATIONSHIP WHICH EXISTS BETWEEN US. SO WE GIVE AND RECEIVE TWO MESSAGES SIMULTANEOUSLY. AT SOME VERY BASIC INTUITIVE LEVEL WE ALL KNOW THIS. FOR EXAMPLE WE MAY UNDERSTAND VERY WELL WHAT WE ARE BEING TOLD ON THE OBJECT (CONTENT) LEVEL, AND MAY NOT LIKE AT ALL HOW THE OTHER PERSON IS TELLING IT TO US ON THE RELATIONAL LEVEL.

TECHNICALLY IT IS POSSIBLE TO SAY NO AND YES AT THE SAME TIME ON DIFFERENT LEVELS. WHEREAS MUCH OF THE RELATIONAL MESSAGE CAN BE VERBAL, MOST OF IT IS USUALLY NONVERBAL, (PARALINGUISTICS AND FACIAL EXPRESSION) THIS LEADS TO MIXED MESSAGES AND CONGRUENT-INCONGRUENT CUES. WHEN WE GET TWO MESSAGES, ONE A VERBAL AND ONE A NONVERBAL ONE, THERE IS A TENDENCY FOR US TO BELIEVE THE NONVERBAL ONE BECAUSE IT IS HARDER TO FAKE. CONSIDER ALSO THAT VIRTUALLY ALL OF OUR EMOTIONAL MESSAGES ARE NONVERBAL ONES. THE MESSAGE, "I LOVE YOU" IS NOT JUST THE WORDS.

EVELYN SIEBURG BECAME INTERESTED IN THE RELATIONAL LEVEL MESSAGE, AND CONSTRUCTED THE PERCEIVED CONFIRMATION INVENTORY. SHE OPERATIONALIZED CONFIRMATION. WE COULD SAY THAT SHE MADE IT MORE PRECISE AND MORE AVAILABLE. AL GOLDBERG DIRECTED THE STUDY. THIS WAS THE FIRST PIECE OF RESEARCH ON CONFIRMATION DONE IN THE DEPARTMENT AND IT WAS SEMINAL. IT WAS ABOUT HEALTHY AND UNHEALTHY WAYS OF RELATING. AND IT WAS VEIN THAT WE HAVE BEEN MINING EVER SINCE. WE'VE PROBABLY HAD MORE THAN TWENTY DISSERTATIONS DONE IN THE AREA.

SO WHAT IS CONFIRMATION? IN THE BROADEST SENSE, IT IS POSITIVE RELATIONAL INTERACTION, REGARDLESS OF CONTENT. BUT IT ISN'T FLATTERY. ALSO, IT ISN'T THE CARL ROGERS' "UNCONDITIONAL POSITIVE REGARD." WE CAN CONFIRM PEOPLE WE DON'T LIKE. IT ISN'T AGREEMENT. IT IS MUCH MORE CONFIRMING TO ARGUE WITH SOMEONE THAN TO IGNORE SOMEONE. IT IS A WAY OF INITIATING POSITIVE INTERACTIONS, BUT IT IS ALSO A WAY OF RESPONDING TO SOMEONE ELSE'S MESSAGE. THIS IS HOW WE MAKE CONTACT OR FAIL TO MAKE CONTACT WITH ANOTHER HUMAN BEING.

HOW DOES ONE RECOGNIZE, ACKNOWLEDGE AND ENDORSE ANOTHER PERSON? ONE DOES IT BY INTERACTING (INITIATING AND RESPONDING) IN A WAY THAT IS DIRECT, RELEVANT, AND CONGRUENT WITH THE OTHER PERSON'S MESSAGE AND FEELINGS. I WILL COME BACK TO THIS IDEA LATER.

EVELYN SIEBURG WAS THEN A FACULTY MEMBER HERE IN THE 1970S. ONE OF EVELYN'S STUDENTS, MERELYN JACOBS, ESSENTIALLY RANK ORDERED CONFIRMING-DISCONFIRMING MESSAGES AND MADE A STAIRSTEP MODEL OF THEM. SHE DETERMINED THAT THERE WERE MORE WAYS TO DISCONFIRM (TO BE DYSFUNCTIONAL) THAN THERE WERE WAYS TO CONFIRM.

AT THIS POINT IT SEEMS THAT I OUGHT TO GIVE A FEW EXAMPLES OF DISCONFIRMATION. THERE ARE BASICALLY THREE CATEGORIES FOR A VAST NUMBER OF BEHAVIORS. THE THREE CATEGORIES ARE AN INDIFFERENT RESPONSE, AN IMPERVIOUS RESPONSE, AND A DISQUALIFYING RESPONSE.

- AN INDIFFERENT RESPONSE IS ONE WHICH DENIES THE OTHER'S EXISTENCE. A FIELD INVESTIGATION BY ANNE MATHEWS ON THE COMMUNICATIVE BEHAVIOR OF LIBRARIANS TURNED UP LIBRARIANS WHO IGNORED STUDENTS WHO WERE STANDING RIGHT IN FRONT OF THEM. HOW IS THAT FOR FAILURE TO ACKNOWLEDGE? REMEMBER THE RALPH ELLISON BOOK, INVISIBLE MAN, IN WHICH HE EXPLAINED THAT A BLACK MAN IN AMERICA IS SO DISCOUNTED AND IGNORED, HE CAN WALK AROUND AND NOT EVEN BE LOOKED AT. WHITES ARE INDIFFERENT TO HIS EXISTENCE. FOR ALL PURPOSES, HE IS INVISIBLE.

- NATURALLY, THERE ARE DEGREES OF INDIFFERENCE WHICH RUN FROM "DENIAL OF PRESENCE" TO "AVOIDING INVOLVEMENT." FACULTY MEMBERS SEE "AVOIDING INVOLVEMENT" ALL OF THE TIME IN CLASS WHEN THEY ARE GOING TO CALL ON A STUDENT AND NONE OF THE STUDENTS WILL LOOK AT THEM. THAT IS CALLED A "DISTANCING TACTIC."

- MY FAVORITE EXAMPLE OF AN INDIFFERENT RESPONSE IS ALSO FROM ANNE MATHEWS. SHE WAS IN A SOCIOLOGY PROFESSOR'S OFFICE TRYING TO RECRUIT HIM FOR HER DISSERTATION COMMITTEE. HE SAID, "I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU MEAN BY ALL OF THIS CONFIRMATION STUFF." ANNE SAID, "IT'S WHAT YOU'RE DOING RIGHT NOW. I'M TRYING TO TALK WITH YOU AND YOU'RE OPENING YOUR MAIL.

- NEXT, AN IMPERVIOUS RESPONSE IS A LACK OF AWARENESS OF OR A DISTORTION OF THE OTHER PERSON'S PERCEPTIONS. THIS IS SIMILAR TO LAING'S CONCEPT OF "MYSTIFICATION." IT SAYS YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU THINK AND YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU FEEL AND YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU MEAN. THERE ARE A VAST NUMBER OF WAYS OF DOING THIS:

- "SURELY YOU DON'T MEAN THAT."
- "YOU'RE ONLY SAYING THAT BECAUSE..."
- "WHAT YOU'RE TRYING TO SAY IS THIS..."
- "STOP CRYING...THERE'S NOTHING WRONG WITH YOU."
- "DON'T BE SILLY...YOU'RE NOT AFRAID."
- "YOU DON'T WANT THAT. THIS IS WHAT YOU WANT..."

- IF YOU HAVE LIVED WITH SOMEONE WHO DOES THIS, YOU ARE PROBABLY USED TO HAVING YOUR EXPERIENCES, MOTIVES AND FEELINGS INTERPRETED FOR YOU AND YOUR OWN SENSE OF REALITY IGNORED. IT IS THIS KIND OF COMMUNICATION WHICH MAKES FOR CRAZY CHILDREN.

- FINALLY, A DISQUALIFYING RESPONSE MAY DISQUALIFY THE SPEAKER THROUGH DIRECT DISPARAGEMENT SUCH AS NAME-CALLING, CRITICISM, BLAME, OR HOSTILE ATTACK, SUCH AS GOES ON IN CONFLICTS, BUT IT CAN BE MUCH MORE SUBTLE.

- SOMETIMES IT IS SARCASM (PARALINGUI STICS WHICH SAY THE OPPOSITE OF THE WORDS), SOMETIMES EYEROLLING, AND SOMETIMES JUST A SIGH. DISQUALIFICATION DISCOUNTS A PERSON. IT SAYS THAT THE PERSON IS INSIGNIFICANT AND/OR WORTHLESS.

- YOU CAN ALSO DISQUALIFY A MESSAGE, SAYING THAT THE MESSAGE HAS NO VALIDITY. YOU CAN DO THIS THROUGH DIRECT REJECTION (THAT'S STUPID.) OR INDIRECTLY BY DISJUNCTION. A DISJUNCTION IS AN INCONGRUOUS OR TANGENTIAL RESPONSE.

- THE TANGENTIAL RESPONSE WAS IDENTIFIED BY JURGEN REUSCH IN DISTURBED COMMUNICATION IN 1958, AND IDENTIFIED AGAIN BY GREGORY BATESON AGAIN IN HIS DESCRIPTION OF THE DOUBLE BINDS WHICH PRODUCE SCHIZOPHRENIC CHILDREN.

- EXAMPLE: "MOMMY MOMMY LOOK AT THE FROG."
- "GO WASH YOUR HANDS."

- THE "GO WASH YOUR HANDS," RESPONSE IS TANGENTIAL AND DISQUALIFYING BY BEING DISJUNCTIVE IN THE TRANSACTIONAL SENSE. CURRENTLY, A TRANSACTIONAL MODEL APPEARS TO BE THE BEST ONE FOR EXPLAINING WHAT GOES ON IN INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION.

I'D LIKE TO DESCRIBE JUST BRIEFLY JUST A COUPLE OF THE INVESTIGATIONS I'VE DIRECTED IN THIS AREA. ONE WAS CONDUCTED BY A CANADIAN, PATRICK CLARKE. HE HYPOTHESIZED THAT AT DIFFERENT STAGES OF A MARRIAGE, DIFFERENT COMMUNICATION VARIABLES WOULD BE TIED TO A COLLAPSED DEPENDENT OUTCOME MEASURE, SATISFACTION-ATTRACTION. SO, AT FIVE YEARS OUT, TEN YEARS OUT, FIFTEEN YEARS OUT, DIFFERENT INDEPENDENT COMMUNICATION VARIABLES WOULD MATTER IN THE MARRIAGE. WHAT HE FOUND OUT WAS A SURPRISE TO HIM AND TO ME. HE DETERMINED THAT AT ANY STAGE OF THE MARRIAGE, MORE THAN HALF OF A PARTNER'S SATISFACTION WITH THE MARRIAGE AND ATTRACTION TO THE OTHER WAS BECAUSE THAT PERSON FELT CONFIRMED. MARRIAGES IN WHICH THERE WAS LESS FEELING OF CONFIRMATION WERE LESS SATISFYING.

THIS FITS WITH RESEARCH CONDUCTED BY CARL LARSON ON MARRIED COUPLES IN KANSAS. THE WOMEN WHO SAID THEY FELT REALLY UNDERSTOOD BY THEIR HUSBANDS, HAD HUSBANDS WHO WERE WILLING TO SPEND LONG PERIODS OF TIME TALKING WITH THEM ABOUT FAIRLY TRIVIAL MATTERS. ONE WAY TO LET SOMEONE KNOW YOU VALUE THEM IS TO SPEND TIME TALKING WITH THEM. FORGET ALL OF THOSE MYTHS ABOUT "QUALITY TIME." "QUALITY TIME" IS A RATIONALIZATION FOR NOT SPENDING TIME WITH SOMEONE YOU THINK YOU OUGHT TO BE SPENDING TIME WITH, NAMELY YOUR CHILD.

ANOTHER INVESTIGATION WAS CONDUCTED BY CAROL RADETSKY. WE HAD LONG SUSPECTED THAT A LOT OF THE RELATIONAL MESSAGE WAS NONVERBAL, BUT WERE UNABLE TO GET A HANDLE ON IT. NONVERBAL IS A VERY BUSY CHANNEL. CAROL WAS ABLE TO DO IT. FIRST SHE GAVE MARRIED COUPLES THE SPANIER TEST ON MARITAL ADJUSTMENT. ONE ADVANTAGE OF THE SPANIER IS ITS VALIDITY AND ANOTHER IS THAT IT IS ONLY ONE PAGE LONG. BOTH MARITAL PARTNERS FILLED THEM OUT. THEN CAROL PUT THEM BOTH BEFORE TWO VIDEO CAMERAS AND HAD THEM DISCUSS THEIR CONGRUENT AND DISCREPANT ITEM SCORES. WHEN THAT WAS COMPLETE, SHE INTERVIEWED THEM SEPARATELY. THE WIFE LOOKED AT HIS VIDEO AND THE HUSBAND LOOKED AT HER VIDEO.

CAROL ASKED THEM TO STOP THE TAPE AND TO CALL ATTENTION TO ANYTHING SAID OR DONE WHICH MADE THEM FEEL "LESS UNDERSTOOD, RESPECTED, OR ACCEPTED" OR THE REVERSE. SHE HAD FOURTEEN FINDINGS SIGNIFICANT AT THE .05 LEVEL. TO MAKE A LONG STORY SHORT, MARRIED COUPLES BECOME EXTREMELY SENSITIVE TO NONVERBAL CUES FROM THEIR PARTNERS, PARTICULARLY ATTENDING, LISTENING, EYE CONTACT, LOOKING DOWN, LOOKING AWAY, TONE OF VOICE, AND MOUTH TENSION. THEY ARE VERY AWARE OF RELATIONAL MESSAGES HOWEVER SMALL AND MICRO-MOMENTARY THEY MIGHT BE. ONE WOMAN ACTUALLY IDENTIFIED TENSION IN HER HUSBAND'S BACK, EVEN THOUGH IT WASN'T ON CAMERA. SHE SAID SHE "KNEW" IT WAS THERE.

RIGHT NOW I HAVE TWO STUDENTS WHO ARE CONDUCTING DISSERTATION RESEARCH IN CONFIRMATION. LANI SINCLAIR IS LOOKING AT GOOD BOSSES IN THE CHEVRON OIL COMPANY IN CALIFORNIA. I HOPE SHE FINDS SOME. HER OUTCOME MEASURE IS COMPANY LOYALTY. ELAINE SWOPE IS LOOKING AT BAD BOSSES IN A VARIETY OF BUSINESSES HERE IN COLORADO. I THINK SHE'LL FIND PLENTY. HER MEDIATING VARIABLE IS GENDER DIFFERENCES. BOTH OF THEM ARE ASKING EMPLOYEES ABOUT THE CONFIRMING-DISCONFIRMING BEHAVIOR OF THEIR BOSSES. WE SUSPECT THAT THE APPRAISAL OF THE BOSSES IS NOT BASED ON WHETHER THE EMPLOYEES UNDERSTAND THE BOSSES CLEARLY ON THE OBJECT LEVEL. IT IS NOT ABOUT THE WELL-CONCEIVED AND WELL-DELIVERED MESSAGE. IT IS NOT ABOUT MAKING SENSE. WE SUSPECT THAT THESE POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE BOSS APPRAISALS ARE TIED TO THE RELATIONAL MESSAGES, THE CONFIRMING AND DISCONFIRMING BEHAVIOR OF MANAGERS.

AT THIS POINT I NEED TO SAY THAT I HAVE BEEN TALKING ABOUT ONLY ONE INTERPERSONAL VARIABLE, CONFIRMATION, AND THAT THERE ARE NUMEROUS OTHERS WHICH AFFECT RELATIONSHIPS SUCH AS PERCEPTION, TRUST, NEEDS OPENNESS, AND ATTRACTION, AND WE HAVE HAD STUDENTS WORKING WITH THESE OTHER VARIABLES AS WELL.

EXAMPLES:

IMMEDIACY AND NON-IMMEDIACY (HELEN GOTHBERG)
DISCLOSURE AND INTIMACY (COURTNEY HALL)
COMPETENCY AND EMPATHY (MARK REDMOND)

ALL OF THESE AFFECT HOW WE RELATE TO OTHERS.

IT SEEMS CLEAR THAT SOME WAYS OF RELATING ARE MORE SATISFYING THAN OTHERS: THEY ARE HUMANIZING. (PEOPLE ARE NOT TREATED AS OBJECTS OR FUNCTIONS.) THEY ARE INDIVIDUATING: (PEOPLE ARE ALLOWED TO EXPERIENCE THE WORLD THROUGH THEIR OWN NERVOUS SYSTEMS INSTEAD OF SOMEONE ELSE'S.) AND THEY ARE CONFIRMING. (PEOPLE ARE RECOGNIZED, ACKNOWLEDGED AND ENDORSED.) IF WE WANT TO ESTABLISH RELATIONAL CONTACT WITH ANOTHER PERSON, WE CAN DELIBERATELY CONFIRM THEM BY ACKNOWLEDGING THE OTHER PERSON, BY BEING CONGRUENT WITH THE OTHER'S CONTENT, BY ACKNOWLEDGING THE OTHER'S FEELINGS, AND BY BEING CLEAR, CONGRUENT AND EXPRESSIVE OF OUR OWN THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS.

SOME THEOLOGIANS CALL THIS "DIALOGUE." IT IS A VERY EXISTENTIAL IDEA. YOU STATE YOUR TRUTH AND THEN YOU LISTEN TO THE OTHER PERSON STATE HIS/HER TRUTH WITHOUT ANY ATTEMPT IN ANY WAY TO MANIPULATE OR CONTROL THE OTHER. IDEALLY, IT IS A CONVERSATION "BETWEEN I AND THOU" IN WHICH YOU TREAT THE OTHER PERSON WITH BASIC RESPECT (A THOU) AND THEN YOU REVERSE ROLES AND BECOME A "'THOU" FOR THAT OTHER PERSON.

REMEMBER NOW WHAT I SAID EARLIER, THAT FOR THE WHOLE HISTORY OF THE STUDY OF COMMUNICATION, IT HAS ALWAYS BEEN ASSUMED THAT IF SOMETHING WAS DISCOVERED, IT COULD BE APPLIED. COMMUNICATION IS NOT NORMALLY STUDIED IN THE ABSTRACT. IF YOU REALLY KNOW SOMETHING, YOU CAN APPLY IT. IF YOU ARE UNABLE TO APPLY IT, IT PROBABLY ISN'T TRUE. THIRTY YEARS AGO ELWOOD MURRAY SAID THAT EVERY THEORY IS A THERAPY. THIS IS A GOOD EXAMPLE. WE CAN PAY ATTENTION TO RELATIONAL MESSAGES THAT WE SEE AROUND US AND WE CAN PAY ATTENTION TO IT IN OUR OWN LIVES. AND WE CAN CONFIRM PEOPLE IF WE WISH TO.

MAKING SENSE AND MAKING CONTACT ARE NOT MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE. ONE CAN DO BOTH OR NEITHER. BUT IF WE WANT TO ENGAGE IN DIALOGUE AND TO EXCHANGE POSITIVE RELATIONAL MESSAGES, IF WE CARE AT ALL ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS, THEN CONFIRMATION IS HOW IT ALL HAPPENS. IF HEALTHY RELATIONS WITH OTHERS MATTER, IT MAKES SENSE TO MAKE CONTACT.

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Second in a series of lectures for the Humanities Institute at the University of Denver, Denver, CO., given on November 11, 1999. Alton Barbour, Ph.D. is Professor of Human Communication Studies in the School of Communication at the University of Denver. He can be contacted through abarbour@du.edu.